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Home Shopping at Your Fingertips! (Enhance Your Mall Kiosk With the Latest Technology)

by Etchison-Sparks, Realtors/Better Homes and Gardens®

Agent support at the Mounds Mall Information Center was becoming a problem. Agents were not wanting to take their turn at the mall. From an in-house perspective, as the firm grew, this became more and more of a system problem in keeping the mall updated and current. In addition, the kiosk had been at the mall since 1992, with very few changes.

The objectives of this project were to maintain the presence at the mall for listing purposes, instill excitement and commitment from the agents and present the latest technology to the public while being user-friendly within the office.

Members of the firm received a tape in the mail from a company named Sewata presenting a touch-screen computer system for home shopping. Originally created for companies with no mall presence, a vision began that evolved into the kiosk computer system they are now finalizing. The challenge was to take the best of the current kiosk, the *Better Homes and Gardens* Real Estate philosophy of the value of being at the mall — and to enhance it with the new system.

1. The present structure was changed by removing one of the pillars and one side of the kiosk, changing the structure from a rectangle to a U-shaped unit. The computer was kept for agents to use with MLS information.
2. The pillar removed was moved to the other end of the mall — giving us a presence at both entrances.
3. Pictures are removed from the pillars and information on homes is now available through the touch screen kiosk.
4. The new kiosk was incorporated into the present one. To be added: matching countertops that will coordinate with the touch screen kiosk unit, a large arrow above the touch screen, and signage directing the public to the unit.
5. The big addition: They added three 27-inch video screens that constantly show the touch screen in all directions. One faces each direction on the kiosk itself, the third is presently being installed on the pillar at the other end of the mall. Homes flash on the screen when no one is using it, and if someone activates the touch screen, that is projected on all screens.
6. Cooperative marketing is available to cover the costs of the kiosk system. They have presented

this to five advertisers, and all have chosen to advertise. Costs of the project will be totally covered, including the probability that the rented mall space will be covered. Ads can be created in the office.

7. New marketing materials are being designed to introduce the new project.

8. Homes have the option of five pictures (inside and outside) and video tours. Printouts are possible.

9. All is handled with a computer within the office. No extra employees are needed, and since the firm was in need of a new computer system, this solved both problems. Updating can be done daily and changes are easily entered.

10. Computer system options include company information, information on homes, video tours and requests for information (which generate leads) in addition to advertising. Community announcements can be offered also.

Agent excitement is at a high. Even though the kiosk doesn't have to be staffed, agents are choosing to spend time at the mall again.

The firm continues to increase market share — they have more listings than any other company and the residential sales continue to be ahead of the other companies for the year. Response by homeowners has been fantastic. All are impressed by the options of multiple pictures and video tour.

Updating procedures for the mall are now simplified — and changes can occur immediately. Recruitment has been terrific. Eight agents have been added including three from a merger of two companies where the agents were to go with the listings to another company. The agents refused, left their listings, contacted the firm personally, requested interviews, and were hired. They valued the mall before, and now more so, for listings and personal promotion.

The addition of the computer system in the office was an expense they were facing whether they changed the kiosk or not — and this way, it is being paid for by the advertisers.

Advertising dollars will cover the total expense of the project, with expectations they will also cover the cost of the lease space they were already obligated to. A win-win situation.

People are entering their names, addresses and phone numbers requesting materials and/or contacts — a great prospecting tool.

By removing the home pictures from the pillars they are able to use the spaces to highlight the agents (for example, the agent of the month will have 8x10 pictures for the month), new home construction, or other projects of the company and /or community. This kiosk also has room for *Better Homes and Gardens* Real Estate Service materials.

Agents will have an opportunity to create a personal promotion to be included with the advertising section. This is being offered at a reduced cost.

Community involvement will be encouraged as they do a community service mailing offering space for announcements, etc. in a rotating advertising spaces (at no cost) for great PR.

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